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Children Matter

Experts Talk

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Également disponible en français sous le titre
Les enfants, c'est important
Les experts nous en parlent

© Minister of Supply and Services Canada,
1992
Cat. H74-50/1992E
ISBN 0-662-19888-3





Having spent much of my life as an educator, a father, and now, as Minister of National Health and Welfare, I know the effect adults can have on children's lives. The combination of love and knowledge from a parent, a caregiver or, in fact any adult, makes all the difference for a child. Because these qualities shape a child's world.

Brighter Futures is a program for and about children and their parents. The more all Canadians know about children and parenting, the more likely all children living in Canada will grow to be healthy, happy and secure adults.

We've all got questions about caring for children. That's natural. And no one has all the answers. That is why this booklet has been developed by several well-known children's experts working together to produce this valuable information.

I welcome your comments and suggestions, because when we all work together, we **can** ensure a brighter future for Canada's children.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Benoit Bouchard".

Benoit Bouchard
Minister of National Health
and Welfare

Healthy children playing happily, their laughter and squeals of delight filling the air — this is how we like to think of childhood. As caring adults, there are things we can do to help make childhood happier and more secure for all children in Canada.

First, we should ***respect children*** — for their playfulness, their unique view of the world and their enormous potential. Children are not little adults. They should be respected simply for being children. One way to do this is to see the world through their eyes. We can let children know, through words and actions, that we appreciate the richness they add to our lives. Like every human being, a child has the right to be treated with respect and consideration.

Second, we must ***value and support parents***. From time to time, all parents need extra help and encouragement. A new baby, the loss of a job, difficulties with a teenager, an illness in the family — these kinds of events are challenges that all families face. In times of family stress, a sympathetic ear, a helping hand and information on where to get help can go a long way in assisting parents and their children to manage better.

Third, we must make an extra effort to ***help children at risk***. One child in five living in Canada suffers from poverty, ill health, neglect or abuse.

These children, whose basic needs for care and security are not met, may never reach their full potential. We must act early to prevent these problems from diminishing any child's future.

As individuals, we can make a real difference in children's lives by volunteering our time, by exercising leadership and by talking to others about the importance of making an extra effort on behalf of children.

We hope you find our ideas useful and add them to your own. Please join with us to help nurture and protect all of Canada's children.

Together we can do it!

Doris Dillies

K. E. Rogers

Don Offord

W. Romph

Deeceel

G. Ann Charter

Laudia Pearson

Nutrition



How can I get my child to eat enough of the right things?

Almost all parents worry about what their children eat, but there is less reason to worry than you think. When they are hungry, healthy children will eat enough of the foods they need, if parents can give them a variety of healthy foods in a relaxed atmosphere. Here are some things to remember about children and food:

- To develop healthy eating habits, it's important for a child to develop his or her own sense of control over food. Your child won't be able to do this if you insist on deciding when, what and how much to eat. Don't let meal time become a contest of wills.
- Just like adults, children like some foods and dislike others. Respect these feelings. For example, if your child doesn't like squash, but likes carrots, keep carrots in the refrigerator. The food value of carrots and squash is about the same.

Doris Gillis
Antigonish, Nova Scotia

Doris Gillis is a nutrition consultant working in health promotion, with a special interest in children. She was involved in developing and writing the Canadian guidelines on Promoting Nutritional Health during the Preschool Years.

Preventing Child Abuse



How do I know if my child is being abused?

The overwhelming majority of children who are physically or sexually abused are abused by someone they know, and who is in a position of authority.

The most important thing is having open communication with your child. If your child tells you something has happened, or shows unexplained changes in behaviour, or shows fear of a certain person or place, try to find out why. Children have the right to be heard, to be listened to. Let your children know that they should talk to you about things that have happened to them; they must know that secrets about abuse should be told.



What do I do if I suspect a child is being abused?

In Canada, anyone who suspects abuse has a responsibility to report that suspicion immediately to the child welfare authorities or to the police.

Aside from a legal responsibility, everyone has an obligation to ensure the safety of children and to assist parents and caregivers who may be in need of help. If you see a parent who is obviously under stress, ask if there is anything you might do to help. Mutual support is essential to reduce the risk of child abuse.

Rix Rogers, C.E.O.
Toronto, Ontario

Rix Rogers is the C.E.O. of the Institute for the Prevention of Child Abuse. From 1987-90, he served as the special advisor to the Minister of Health and Welfare on child sexual abuse and prepared the report Reaching for Solutions. Prior to the Institute, he worked for 30 years with the YMCA of Canada.

Parenting



Sometimes I lose my patience and yell at my children. How can I learn to get along better with them?

The first thing to remember is not to be too hard on yourself. All parents, at one time or another, lose patience and yell at their children. If the yelling or loss of patience persists or appears to be getting worse, or worries you all the time, then you might consider two things.

First, maybe the behaviour of your children is not all that bad, and you realize you are over-reacting to it. Talk things over with a close friend. Review with yourself your emotional well-being. Make sure you are treating yourself well, taking time for your own pleasures, and are able to share feelings with those close to you.

Second, perhaps the behaviour of your children is difficult and would be hard for almost any parent. Some children are especially hard to raise. Try being more consistent. Focus on one behaviour at a time, set your expectations and the consequences if these expectations are not met. If difficulties persist, you might want to consider taking a parenting course. They really work. And you know, you can always consult your family doctor.

Remember, no matter how bad or desperate you feel in trying to deal with your children, help is available which can make life happier for both you and your children.

Dan Offord, M.D.
Hamilton, Ontario

Dan Offord, M.D., is Head of the Division of Child Psychiatry at McMaster University. His major research interests are in learning how to prevent emotional and behavioural problems in children. Dr. Offord also directs a summer camp for economically disadvantaged boys and girls.

PLAY



Why is play important for children?

Playing is not the opposite of working. Free play allows children to develop their bodies and their imaginations, to practise the new things they are learning, to build confidence and to learn to get along with others. All children need lots of opportunities to play.

How can I encourage my own children's healthy play?

You can encourage your children's play in many ways. For example:

- **Make room for your children.** They don't need a lot of room to play, but they do need some freedom to create their own space. Remember, a mess is not always a mess as far as your children are concerned.
- **Play with your children and show them new ways of playing.** Begin the play, then let go. Their imagination will do the rest!
- **Save everyday household items that your children can use in play** — old sheets, birthday cards, clothes. Children don't need store-bought toys to learn and have fun.
- **Make sure your child has time to play with other children and time to play alone.**

What can I do to increase play opportunities for children in my neighbourhood?

Survey the places in your neighbourhood where it's good for children to play. Get involved! Pick up anything that doesn't belong there or is unsafe for children. If there aren't many good places for children, work with other parents and community groups to create more safe public play areas. To get others involved, help your neighbourhood organize a community "play day." Let children know that their play is valued.

Is watching TV play?

Television watching is one way to enhance your child's imagination and to help make play richer. But television viewing itself can lead to inactivity. To learn and develop as they should, children need to be involved. One way to help is to watch TV with your children occasionally, and talk with them about the programs. Children can become good critics from an early age!

Valerie Fronczek
Vancouver, British Columbia

Valerie Fronczek is the Executive Director of the Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia. She has been a strong advocate for children's play for over 20 years and has contributed to the improvement of indoor and outdoor hospital environments for children.

Everyone's Responsibility



I hear all the time that kids are everyone's responsibility. As one person, what can I do to make a difference?

Each and every one of us can play an important role in a vulnerable child's life, whether we are a parent, business person, professional, volunteer, concerned adult or another child.

One of my friends told this story which illustrates the point. His 15-year-old daughter revealed to him that a school friend was depressed and often spoke of suicide.

My friend realized that help was needed, but wondered whether his daughter should provide help on her own. He suggested to his daughter that he go with her and meet her friend. She agreed.

He discovered that the young man had major problems in school, particularly in relating to his school mates. So my friend invited him to supper and said that he was welcome anytime. Although hesitant at first, his daughter's friend ate with them and visited several times. He began to get involved in sports and soon his interest in life and his self-esteem picked up.

This is an example of a young person helping a young friend through a difficult time, and a parent with a busy professional life, who took the time to listen to his child and to reach out through friendship to another person's child.

For these two people, helping a child at risk is not just everyone's business; they made it their business.

Laurier Boucher
Montreal, Quebec

Laurier Boucher is the Coordinator for Youth Protection for the Association des centres de services sociaux du Québec. He is also the Vice-President of the Corporation des travailleurs sociaux du Québec.

How can I get involved in my own neighbourhood?

Every community has a wealth of human resources. Every neighbourhood has a group of people with a variety of skills to offer. Sharing these resources and skills can have a dramatic impact on your own child's life and the lives of children you see every day.

For example, organizing a small group or "sharing circle" for interested parents in your neighbourhood can provide an opportunity to share knowledge, concerns and skills. Someone may assume leadership in the circle, but that person doesn't have to be an expert. Everyone in the circle should have the opportunity to speak and share — including the children, especially if it is a family circle.

Once you have identified a few parents in your neighbourhood, invite them for an informal gathering at your home or at a community building. Allow time for introductions and for people to share concerns or needs. For example, one parent may want to talk about how difficult it is to find a good babysitter. Another may raise concerns about the safety of the

children in the neighbourhood. As people continue to share, their practical suggestions and mutual support can benefit individual parents and the group as a whole.

Ann Charter
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Ann Charter is on the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. She is an aboriginal woman who is actively involved in her community and serves as a board member of Anishnabe R.E.S.P.E.C.T. and the Native Women's Transition Centre.



Listening to Youth



Young people in the care of the child welfare system have a lot to share about the positive role adults should play in their lives. What are some important qualities that show young people that adults truly respect and care about them?

Whether we are talking about young people in care or young people in general, the approach is the same. It is important to listen to what they have to say and to encourage them to share their thoughts and speak for themselves. Valuing their opinions means allowing young people to make their own decisions, recognizing that even their mistakes are valuable lessons.

Young people have many contributions to make and should be involved in all decision making that affects their lives.

Tracy Black-Poore
Ottawa, Ontario

Tracy Black-Poore is the National Director of the National Youth In Care Network. The NYICN is a non-profit, charitable organization run by and for young people who are, or have, been in the care of child welfare authorities across Canada. It is dedicated to increase awareness of the needs of youth in and from state care and to promote the views and opinions of these young people.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child



What is the Convention on the Rights of the Child?

Children are especially vulnerable and require special rights to protect them and to meet their unique needs. The Convention is an international legal agreement that provides us with a set of standards that confirms the respect our society gives its youngest members. It was ratified by the Government of Canada on December 11, 1991.

What will the Convention do for children?

Underlying all articles of the Convention is the principle that "the best interests of the child should always be a primary consideration." It outlines the responsibilities governments and adults have to children and their families by ensuring a child's:

- **Right to Survival** – through provision of adequate food, shelter, clean water and primary health care;
- **Right to Protection** – from abuse, neglect and exploitation; and
- **Right to Develop** – in a safe environment, through the provision of education, constructive play, advanced health care and the opportunity to participate in the culture, free from discrimination.

The Convention asks us to look at children in a new way; as people with the same inherent rights as all other members of the human family.

Landon Pearson
Ottawa, Ontario

After a long association with the Canadian Council on Children and Youth, Landon Pearson helped to found and now leads the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children. She has a particular interest in the active participation of children and youth in issues concerning them. Mrs. Pearson is the author of Children of Glasnost.

We 10 Things Can Do

1.

Think about how adult attitudes and actions affect children.

2.

Spend more time listening to and communicating with children.

3.

Pay particular attention to articles about children in newspapers and magazines.

4.

Volunteer at a children's hospital or the children's wing of a general hospital.

5.

Donate nutritional foods and baby supplies to a local food bank.

6.

Call a Community Information Service, public health unit, Children's Aid Society or local school to find out how to help children at risk in the community.

7.

Volunteer to help in a preschool program, parents' resource centre, school classroom or an after-school tutoring program.

8.

Get involved with organizations that work directly with children. Your Volunteer Bureau and local United Way can help.

9.

Call a local newspaper to suggest that an article or series be developed on children at risk in the community.

10.

Organize a program that celebrates children in the community, such as a children's festival or community picnic.



The Children's Bureau co-ordinates policies and programs for children within the federal government.

The Children's Bureau values your comments.

Please send to

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